

# Dara McNeice

Local Girl Scout leader has dedicated several years to promoting and organizing programs for local youth

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Working with young women and watching them grow as individuals has been a big part of Dara McNeice's life for the past eight years with her work through Girl Scouts.

McNeice, of Camas' Fern Prairie, said she has a standard response for why she joined Girl Scouts, "My daughter joined and, after a while, the leader needed help so I volunteered."

McNeice grew up in Goldendale, Wash., and moved to the Camas area after marrying her husband, Larry, several years ago.

McNeice began as assistant scout leader for her daughter, Shelby's, troop when she was in the first grade. Now in the eighth grade, the girls, as well as McNeice, have grown and matured a lot since their early days.

"It was different learning how to be a leader," McNeice, who is involved in the Camp Currie Board, RIPP and several other organizations, said. "I was learning to be a new parent and juggling volunteer work was a new dimension for me. I had to make a commitment each week to be there for the girls."

McNeice said she began training for the position, which all leaders and assistant leaders must do, and realized that what she was doing "seemed to be such the right thing to be doing."

Although becoming involved in Girl Scouts began as a way to help the girls, McNeice said she soon realized it was something more.

"It really became apparent to me that I wanted to be there for them and the whole thing was a huge benefit to me as well," she said. "I'm sure Shelby will know later what a huge effect scouting has had on her, but I know already how it has affected me."

When the girls were going into the fifth grade, McNeice became the troop's official leader and has been in that capacity for several years.

Having been involved with the troop for eight years now, McNeice said there are 10 to 13 girls attending the meetings and four of the original girls from the first and second grade are still involved.

McNeice said one of the hardest things about Girl Scouting is keeping the girls interested in it after they reach a certain age.

"Once they are in middle school, they sometimes disappear," she said. "There's a stereotype that you're a nerd if you're a scout, and that's not true. More girls are staying in now, unlike a few years back, but we still lose several."

McNeice said several of the older girls in her oldest daughter's troop, the eighth graders, are staying in because "they believe in themselves."

"They don't care what others say," McNeice said proudly. "They keep busy and have something to do in scouting."

One of the things about scouting that McNeice said she likes is it allows girls to experience and enjoy activities with other girls without the pressure of stronger boys.

"It's a good benefit for girls to be with just other girls," McNeice, a mother of two daughters, Shelby and Carley, and a son, Jamie, said. "Girls with just girls is incredible. Throw in a boy and they act different. It takes away from them. Nothing against boys, girls can just be more themselves with other girls."

McNeice's other Girl Scout troop is comprised of 19 third graders and includes her youngest daughter.

"The girls in both troops are from Camas and Washougal schools, and home-schooled," McNeice said. "All the girls are so wonderful and you get a view of their different lives. They are really a variety."

McNeice said the basic requirements for being a Girl Scout leader includes taking first-aid classes and having the time to commit.

"Generally the leader does everything," she said. "The responsibility for everything falls on the leader."

Aside from being active with the girls on a one-on-one basis, McNeice has also been involved on a more administrative level as well. She has been active at the local neighborhood level on a service team, which works to provide services for the girls.

Some of the roles McNeice has served in during her time with the local Camas-Washougal scouts include being the neighborhood chair from 1987-90, in which she presided at meetings, handled area complaints, approved overnight camp-outs and took care of other administrative issues.

She was also troop organizer from 1991-1992. It was her job to recruit more girls into the scouting program in the area.

"Currently we have about 250 girls active in scouting, but our numbers go up and down," McNeice said. "The Camas-Washougal area is pretty big. Troops are split by school districts and home schooling, but a lot of Camas-Washougal girls are mixed in troops."

McNeice said the local scouts belong to the Columbia River Girl Scout Council in Lake Oswego, Ore.

In order to make scouting fun and exciting, McNeice said about 70 adult volunteers, including troop leaders, assistant leaders and other helpers work to make the program a success.

For the upcoming year, 1994-1995, McNeice will once again be in the role of troop organizer, recruiting both scouts and leaders.



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"Girl Scouts is a way for adult females to really be active in the lives of several girls," McNeice said. "I get to go camping because I'm in scouting, but if I wasn't involved, we would probably never go. Our family style would have too many conflicts. But, with scouting, I'm able to enjoy different things with the girls."

Although individuals may not realize it, Girl Scout leaders must be reappointed to their leadership role each year.

"It's never guaranteed you'll be a leader," McNeice said. "You need to make sure you keep up with your training and follow the rules of the organization."

McNeice said one of the main goals of Girl Scouts is to allow girls to become independent.

"The girls are forced to plan and decide what they want to do and what they need to do in order to achieve the goal," McNeice, 35, said. "Girls brainstorm ideas and set their goals for the year."

McNeice said since she is in two Girl Scout troops, she is doubly-lucky since she gets to go on several outings with the girls.

One of the best things about being a leader, McNeice said, is "Watching the girls bonding together and working together for a common goal. It is such a great thing to see happening."

Aside from camp outs and other activities, the Girl Scouts have a booth at the Clark County Fair, a summer camp in Camas and other activities that unite the girls.

Since she is so involved in scouting, could she give it all up if her daughters decided to stop being Girl Scouts? McNeice said that decision would have to be made when the time came, and with her daughters.

"I would continue as long as it wouldn't bother the girls," she said. "I wouldn't want the girls to feel shorted or slighted by my involvement. It can take a lot of time and commitment to be active in scouts."

McNeice said scouting has become very important to her. In fact, she hasn't taken some jobs because it would conflict with her Girl Scout schedule. Both troops meet with McNeice each Wednesday at the First Baptist Church in Camas at two different times.

"I see the good Girl Scouts does for all of us and it's a fun thing," McNeice said. "I honestly feel that the first meeting I walked into, I changed. Being involved in Girl Scouts has made me actively aware of my actions and behavior. Because if kids say, 'Dara did it, it must be OK,' I want to be sure what I'm doing is OK."